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British consent

LONDON - Britain's unelected House of Lords doesn't want to make gays equal to straights.

The Lords overruled the House of Commons' vote to lower the age of consent for gay sex from 18 to 16, to match the law for straights. The Lords voted 290-122 to disagree with the Commons.

The House of Lords cannot veto legislation and its powers are restricted to delaying legislation passed by the elected House of Commons, although through detailed criticism of government bills, it can damage the government's legislative agenda.

Prime Minister Tony Blair and leaders of opposition parties support lowering the age of gay consent, which brings Britain in line with most other European Union nations. Polls suggest that the majority of Britons oppose the measure.

San Francisco law

WASHINGTON - Congress apparently thinks it knows how to run San Francisco better than the city's elected leaders do.

The House has voted to prohibit the spending of federal money on programs implementing a gay rights ordinance in the city.

The proposal by Rep. Frank Riggs, R-CA, was approved 214-212 as part of a larger bill on spending for housing, veterans programs, environmental protection, space and funding for the arts. Supporters said they hoped to get the provision removed during negotiations to reconcile the House bill with a yet-to-be approved Senate version.

The Riggs amendment prohibits any money in the \$94 billion spending bill to be used to implement a San Francisco ordinance that requires employers doing business with the city to provide health and other benefits to same-sex partners.

Gay custody

RALEIGH, NC - A Gay man has lost custody of his sons.

A judge said the sons of Fred Smith would suffer from living with two gay men when he ruled in 1995 and awarded custody to Smith's ex-wife. A state appeals court reversed that decision, but the state Supreme Court sided with the lower court judge in reversing the appeals panel.

Smith and his lover, Tim Tipton, said they had sex behind closed doors but kissed in

front of the boys.

While the high court said homosexuality alone is not enough of a reason to deny a man or woman custody, dissenting Justice John Webb said his colleagues were motivated by their disapproval of a gay lifestyle.

The boys, now 9 and 12, have been living with their mother in Wichita, KS., during the appeals. After her marriage to Smith broke up in 1991, she left him and the boys and moved in with a man she eventually married.

The mother, Carol Pulliam, won custody three years ago after confronting Smith about his sexuality. An attorney for the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, which fights for gay rights, said the ruling was troubling.

"I see a court that looks like it has been so eager to treat a gay parent unfairly that it has really unsettled a whole area of North Carolina law," said Stephen Scarborough, staff attorney in Lambda's southern regional office in Atlanta.

Florence marriage

FLORENCE, Italy - The city council has approved adding gay couples to common law marriage roles. But the powerful Catholic Church doesn't like the idea.

In the Vatican newspaper, Cardinal Silvano Piovaneli fired a broadside at the city for recognizing something that "is against the teachings of the church, that doesn't correspond to our society's or to traditional Christianity's concept of family."

Florence is not the only city that has opened its common law marriage registry to gays. So has Pisa, where two women became the first couple in the nation to register on July 9, and in Voghera.

The registry is symbolic, and couples who register are not considered legally married.

Gay Games

AMSTERDAM - The Gay Games were anything but festive for some of the organizers.

Even before the hoopla of the opening ceremony could fade, the director was fired for mismanagement. Then the city of Amsterdam rushed to the rescue with a \$2.5 million loan to ensure the games go on.

Now games organizers have had to tap a government-funded agency to help pay athletes from developing countries the cash they were promised for food and other necessities.

"It's kind of a dark spot on the party. It's a shame," said Rudolf Steinberger, who

helped organize the competition's marathon.

Fifteen thousand athletes and about 200,000 spectators have flocked to Amsterdam, Europe's self-styled homosexual capital, for the events.

But the firing of director Marc Janssens and the discovery of a trail of unauthorized overspending behind him have overshadowed the \$7 million event.

Janssens, a Dutchman, was fired by the Games' board of directors, which said he "made commitments outside the approved budget, commitments that were also bigger than his authority."

No other details were released.

The games were about \$1 million short, despite more than \$3 million in government subsidies and sponsorship money.

"The problems were severe," said City Hall spokeswoman Mirjam Otten. "It is important for the Games to go on."

Gay victory

WASHINGTON - Gays and lesbians won a surprising and unexpected victory in the House.

The House rejected a proposal by Rep. Joe Hefley, R-CO., to void a Clinton executive order prohibiting discrimination against gays in the federal work force.

In an election year in which Republicans have repeatedly taken on the homosexual community in word and in votes, the 252-176 roll call saw 188 Democrats joined by 63 Republicans who said the proposal went too far. Voting to kill Clinton's order were 161 Republicans and 15 Democrats.

"I speak strongly in my outrage that some on my side of the aisle, my leaders in particular, have sought to make this a political issue," said Rep. Christopher Shays, R-CT.

"This vote reflected the values of our nation," Clinton said in a written statement. "The American people believe in fairness, not discrimination."

Gay discounts

SAN FRANCISCO - What's good for the straights has to be good for the queers, too.

That's what the city of San Francisco says.

Businesses offering discounts and other deals to married couples would be required to extend them to domestic partners, including gay couples, under a proposed city

law that goes to a final vote today.

The first-of-its-kind ordinance would affect a variety of private businesses - including gyms, car rental companies and insurance agencies.

"It makes good business sense," said Supervisor Mark Leno, the proposal's author. "It gives business an additional marketing tool and could help them compete with other businesses."

Gays and Methodists

DALLAS - Gay marriage is a long way off in the United Methodist Church.

The church's Judicial Council has elevated a guideline against same-sex marriages into church canon and says ministers who perform the ceremonies could be defrocked.

The guideline, which was part of the congregation's Social Principles, states: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

The issue arose with the case of the Rev. Jimmy Creech, former pastor of the 1,900-member First United Methodist Church of Omaha, NB. He was accused of disobedience after performing a lesbian wedding ceremony last September in defiance of his bishop.

Creech was acquitted six months later by a church jury. The acquittal prompted the regional bishops to appeal to the Judicial Council for a formal ruling on whether the guideline was merely a moral standard or part of church law.

No Obits

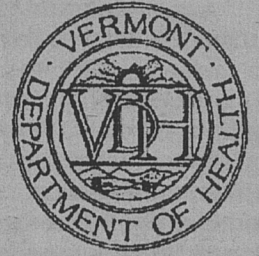
SAN FRANCISCO - A milestone for the Bay Area Reporter and all the people of San Francisco.

For the first time in more than 17 years, the gay weekly contained no obituaries of AIDS victims. As of August 14, no AIDS death notices had arrived at the newspaper for almost a week and a half.

"It's nice to pick up the paper and not read about your friends dying," Tom Hayer said Friday as he sat in a coffee shop in San Francisco's Castro District.

Over the years, the course of the AIDS epidemic could be traced in the pages of the Bay Area Reporter. During the explosion of AIDS cases in the mid-1980s, the paper averaged a dozen obits a week, and they covered two or three pages. One week, there were 31 obituaries.

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